

# A 'Tailored Tools' Approach to Developing a Comprehensive Internal and External Communication System

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## Context

### A Broad Communication Network

The province of Alberta is a western prairie province with a population of approximately 3 million. The Provincial Laboratory (ProvLab) is a critical cornerstone in the provincial response to public health risks, delivering services to a broad range of clients from large acute care laboratories to individual private citizens.

Employing approximately 300 workers on two sites separated by over 300 kilometres, ProvLab is continuously refining a strong, focused internal communication system to ensure the continued success of quality initiatives and services.

In addition to internal and external communication at a regional level, ProvLab plays a prominent role on a global stage, leading research, laboratory-based surveillance, and education initiatives within a complex network of provincial, national, and international healthcare partners.

## Objective

### Stronger Communication at All Levels

Our objective was to develop a comprehensive Communications System to ensure the effective dissemination of information at all levels both in our own organization and within the context of a large network of Provincial and Federal partners and clients. By focusing and refining our communication methods, we set out to strengthen partnerships, increase customer confidence, improve employee satisfaction, and create advocates at all levels.

## Methods

### A 'Tailored Tools' Approach

The implementation plan for our Communication System follows a 'Tailored Tools' philosophy where each communication endeavor is evaluated to ensure the best communication tools are employed to disseminate particular information to a specific audience.

"...the right information in the right format delivered to the right people in the right way..."

### Progression of the Toolbox:

#### Wordmark

The ProvLab wordmark (fig. 1) was officially unveiled in early 2004 to provide a consistent visual identity for the laboratory - a single strong graphic representation of the organization. The innovative wordmark used simple shape and color to evoke a sense of progress and change. This represented a fundamental departure from historic images of microscopes and test tubes, rebranding the organization as a leader in new technology.



Fig.1

Promotion of the new wordmark was strategized upon an internal-to-external expansion. This method first established the new wordmark as a rally point for employees, who carried the wordmark to external partners and clients. Each employee was presented with a jacket bearing the ProvLab wordmark which fostered pride in the new symbol of the organization and a sense of ownership among employees. This internal message was reinforced by positive verbal and written communication from all levels of management. The employees then introduced the message and intent of the new wordmark to external partners and clients, reinforcing a positive and consistent representation of the laboratory.

### Achievement Report

The Achievement Report formally introduced the new vision for ProvLab to our external partners and clients through journalistic stories profiling staff and detailing our success in research and diagnostic testing while showcasing Total Quality Management. Tailored to a lay readership, the Achievement Report used high-impact graphic design, simple language, and a glossy newsstand format to introduce the organization to our advocate base in government and industry (fig. 2). This client group had not previously been offered laboratory publications geared specifically to them. For established partners, the report emphasized the organizational direction introduced through the wordmark and informal verbal channels.

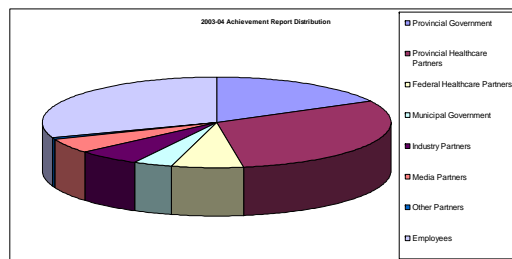


Fig.2

### Partner Bulletins

ProvLab 'Partner Bulletins', which had previously been distributed as memoranda on an individual basis by isolated departments, were centralized through the office of the Client Services Manager. The best method for communicating with each client group affected by new information was determined, and often each bulletin required distribution by several means to achieve the optimum impact (fig.3). Centralizing partner communication ensured structured and timely dissemination of information to partners, enabled consistent tracking of client communication, and provided a consistent point of contact for resolving customer issues regarding new information.

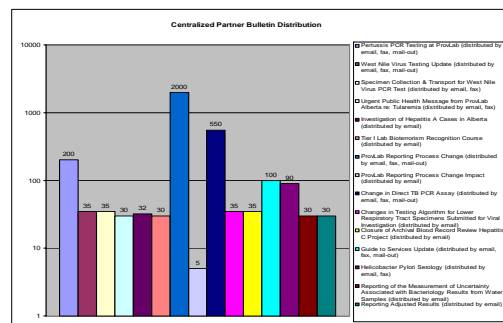


Fig.3

### Communications Advisor

A permanent full-time Communications Advisor was recruited to further consolidate and promote communications functions at the ProvLab. This newly created position will continually seek to enhance the 'Tailored Tools' Communications System.

### Website

The refreshed ProvLab website tied together and expanded upon the tools introduced through communication strategies in the months before. Launched in January 2005, [www.provlab.ab.ca](http://www.provlab.ab.ca) (fig 4) replaced an outdated static web presence. Streamlined design, intuitive navigation, and focused content ensured effective communication to a broad client base while preserving customized information. Targeted multi-tiered advertising through partner bulletins, regional newsletters, conference brochures, email, and presentations encouraged users to visit the refreshed site for the most up to date information about the laboratory.



Fig.4

## Results

The establishment of the ProvLab wordmark has resulted in improved name recognition for the organization. Employees have rallied around the new symbol, advocating for the organization with renewed pride. Further, our healthcare partners have come to identify the organization by the new moniker 'ProvLab'.

The publication of the Achievement Report garnered written commendations from government, industry, and private citizens. We received a high response rate from new government partner recipients. Building these new relationships has increased public awareness of ProvLab.

The centralized partner bulletin process has improved customer service and customer confidence in our organization. Feedback reports from site visits to partner laboratories confirmed that the centralized process has facilitated consistent and effective partner communication. This process has increased our productivity as we recoup time lost on correcting and clarifying customer communication. Partner bulletins are now distributed to targeted groupings ensuring that the correct information reaches specified clients.

As evidenced by our website traffic logs, [www.provlab.ab.ca](http://www.provlab.ab.ca) has been a successful tool for communicating with external and internal customers. Compared to a January baseline of slightly over 100 visitors per week from the prior website, the refreshed website has experienced a marked surge in unique visitors. Advertising initiatives have led to a consistent rise in unique visitors for the periods following the posting of new bulletins and news stories on the website. Weekly unique visitor levels have stabilized at approximately five times the baseline (fig 5).

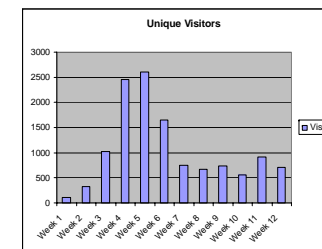


Fig.5

## Conclusions

The application of the 'Tailored Tools' Communication System has led to increased productivity in recouping time lost on correcting miscommunication, improved internal and external client satisfaction, improved ability in coping with transitions affecting various programs and levels in the laboratory, increased recognition and client confidence, and strengthened advocacy.